The University of Chicago

Hegemony and Indirect Balancing in Mainland Southeast Asia

by Paul Thomas Un

August 2021

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Master of Arts Program in the Committee on International Relations

Faculty Advisor: Paul Poast
Preceptor: Gentry Jenkins

Abstract

What factors drive the international politics of tertiary states? Constructivists, such as Alice Ba and Aarie Glas, have argued that conflict occurs within the confines permitted by cultures of diplomacy, which are mutually constituted between states. Such analyses eschew structural factors. Structural realists, meanwhile, leave little room in their analyses for the agency of tertiary states to decide their own foreign policies. Following in the footsteps of other scholars of Southeast Asian international relations, this paper will argue that the choices of Southeast Asian states are limited to them by the hierarchical arrangement of the international system, as expressed via alignment choices. One specific manifestation of politics under these constraints is the phenomenon of indirect balancing, wherein states that are otherwise constrained from balancing a hegemonic actor compensate by balancing against their bandwagoning neighbors. Looking at these emerging rifts between states helps us answer the question why conflict continues to occur between Southeast Asian states, despite the presumed dampening effects of international institutions? Conflict has continued to arise among ASEAN members and has even occurred among states with mutual alignment postures- a fact which helps to explain the counterintuitive evidence for increased conflict even as bandwagoning increases in the region. Evidence for this phenomenon of indirect balancing comes from textual analyses of ASEAN documents for evidence of hegemonic intrusion, data on military interstate disputes, and case studies from contentious political moments in the region's recent history. Understanding this under-studied manifestation of tertiary state power politics can help show how great powers should constructively engage with tertiary powers- a lesson which is especially pertinent in light of a rising China and a United States scrambling to respond to the challenge.

Hegemony and Indirect balancing in Mainland Southeast Asia

In fall of 2017 and continuing into early 2018, tensions were high on the Laos-Cambodian border. The poorly demarcated, colonial-era, boundary saw the mobilization of soldiers on both sides of the border, which resolved only after a bilateral summit of both nations' leaders.[1] This episode was especially surprising to watchers of the region. While border spats are common in Southeast Asia (and Laos and Cambodia are not infrequent participants), a Lao-Khmer conflict had seemed increasingly unlikely, given their shared pro-Chinese stance, and the widely shared perception that both nations represented a unified front for Chinese interests in Southeast Asia.

These links had become so strong in recent years that other regional leaders had begun to question the place of Cambodia and Laos in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), because their pro-Chinese position threatened the organization's consensus-based decision making model.[2] This trend away from consensus is best captured by the 2012 ASEAN summit, hosted by Cambodia, which failed to issue a joint communique for the first time in the organizations 45-year history.[3] Cambodia's veto of the communique, which condemned China's actions in the South China Sea, seemed to herald an extension of Chinese hegemony over Southeast Asia. At the same time, however, this influence has failed to stem conflict between China's neighbors in mainland Southeast Asia.

Conventional wisdom tells us that the intervention of a great power should dampen

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[1] Prashanth Parameswaran. "What's Next After the New Cambodia-Laos Border Tensions?" *The Diplomat*. Thediplomat.com. Web. Accessed April 27, 2021.

[2] Aun Chhengpor. "Ex-Singaporean Diplomat Says ASEAN May Have to Expel Cambodia and Laos". *Voice of America Khmer*. voacambodia.com. Web. Accessed February 19, 2021

[3] Bower, Ernest. "China Reveals Its Hand on ASEAN in Phnom Penh." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Csis.org. Web. Accessed April 26, 2021.

conflict. In addition to the ordering power of the hegemon, tertiary states now have available a greater range of alignment options which can be used to deter threats. The contemporary Southeast Asian experience, however, challenges the efficacy of realignment to seter. Thus, this project seeks to answer the questions: why has conflict continued despite the purported dampening effects of international institutions? And under what alignment conditions do we see increased conflict in mainland Southeast Asia (MSEA)?

This project will argue that, contrary to conventional wisdom, a hegemonically structured international system intensifies conflict in MSEA, while an anarchic structure may dampen the propensity for conflict. This is due to the dynamics of indirect balancing, and the attempts of MSEA states with ostensible hedging or soft balancing alignments to balance against their hegemonic neighbors. Indirect balancing describes the process whereby tertiary states commit to balance against their neighbors, as a way of indirectly balancing the associated hegemon, which they are unable to directly resist. In highly constrained SEA, it is a primary mode of interstate politics.

Traditional explanations for this phenomenon center the actions, policies, and grand strategies of Great Powers- ignoring the actions, policies, and interests of tertiary states. In an era of America First retrenchment and continued hedging on the part of SEA states,[4] this project would provide insight into the alliance strategies of states in MSEA, and how great powers might better ascertain those strategies. The project also seeks to provide insight into the impact of the rise of China- on both great power alliance competition and on tertiary state politics. These conversations are especially important amid the continued debate over the prospect for

[4] Schweller, Randall. "Opposite but Compatible Nationalisms: A Neoclassical Realist Approach to the Future of US–China Relations." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, (2018): 23–48.

desecuritization in Asia,[5] as great powers and international organizations seemingly pull tertiary states in opposing directions.

Literature Review

There are several different literatures which approach the question of balancing and bandwagoning by small states. Realist prevailing wisdom states that, due to the more proximal threat of China, states are more likely to balance with the United States and with each other.[6] This sometimes leads to dire predictions about future conflict, such as the elaborate scenarios given by the likes of Graham Allison-[7] where China lashes out because it fears its security is being threatened, or where Chinese inroads into Western strategic territory is perceived as aggression. The quintessential tension point in these analyses is the so-called first island chain in the South China Sea. However, additional flashpoints include war-ravaged Myanmar and the Straits of Malacca in MSEA, which are both vital for Chinese energy and commercial interests, and which intersect the interests of several tertiary states.[8]

In traditional accounts, states that balance are traditionally classed as status-quo security-seekers, while states that bandwagon are classed as more revisionist and aggressive, because they seek to gain in the spoils. Walt notes that "if bandwagoning is the dominant tendency, then security is scarce because aggression is rewarded."[9] However, as Walt also argues, weak states

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[5] Buzan, Barry. "Asia: A geopolitical reconfiguration." *Politique étrangère* 77, no. 2 (2012): 1-13.
[6] Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. WW Norton & Company, 2001. 391-392.
[7] Allison, Graham. Destined for war: Can America and China escape Thucydides's trap? Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.
[8] Shaofeng, Chen. "China's self-extrication from the "Malacca dilemma" and implications." *International Journal of China Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 18.
[9] Walt, Stephen M. "Alliance formation and the balance of world power." *International security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 4.

are also increasingly likely to bandwagon as allies become less available.[10] This phenomenon is seen widely in the context of Asian international politics. Kim, for example, argues that South Korea is going through this very process, as it seeks to hedge between China and the United States.[11] Deprived of regional allies in Northeast Asia due to historical animosities, South Korea is forced to take a more measured stance towards China.

Instead of outright bandwagoning, MSEA states have historically been associated with these kinds of hedging postures. There is, however, dispute over how to interpret such stances. Some realist scholars may view hedging as evidence of a weak state that is forced to put aside its preferences in the name of security, while others may see hedging as evidence of a strong state, able to disregard security preferences to play great powers for maximum material gains. These limitations need not be driven purely by available resources either. As Kuik notes, the regime dominant-party regime structure in Malaysia and Singapore limited their strategic possibilities, forcing them to turn to hedging for regime legitimation.[12] On the other hand, the calculus of hedging is not just material, but also temporal. Hedging states may disregard gains to be had in the present vis-à-vis a different alignment position, to ascertain the optimum alignment position over time. This, in fact, was the dominant language used to describe US-China relations in the mid-2000s, as both countries sough- from a position of relative strength- to determine the other's motivations.[13]

This contrasts with the view presented by Constructivist scholars, who focus on

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[10] Walt. "Alliance formation and the balance of world power.": 17.
[11] Kim Min-hyung. "Avoiding Being a Crushed Prawn and Becoming a Dolphin Swimming between the Two Fighting Whales? South Korea's Strategic Choice in the Face of the Intensifying Sino–US Competition." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 53, no. 4 (2018): 612-628.
[12] Kuik Cheng-Chwee. "The essence of hedging: Malaysia and Singapore's response to a rising China." *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2008): 161-162.
[13] Medeiros, Evan S. "Strategic hedging and the future of Asia-pacific stability." *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2005): 145-147.

international institutions- such as ASEAN- and the development of pluralistic security community among their members, predicated on the norms shared among member states. For Ba, the hedging posture adopted by states in SEA is an active attempt to maintain neutrality and thus maintain the integrity of the security community.[14] This integrity is predicated on the maintenance of shared norms and continued mutual trust between members.

These explanations, however, remain unsatisfactory, and fail to account for much of the extant empirical evidence. One major area of concern is at the intersection of the alignment literature and the literature on hierarchy. Gilpin, for instance, regards hierarchy as an outmoded, stagnating organizational model compared to European balance of power politics.[15] In this vein he draws on a long line of thinkers which place the formation of European state identity and politics in war-fighting between states. At the same time, however, there are innumerable instances of great powers imposing hierarchical order on tertiary states, and yet international politics continues among them regardless. Thus, the emerging prevailing wisdom among contemporary Asia scholars- both realists and constructivists- is that hierarchy should be viewed as a dynamic force, which comes in gradations- and many, including Goh and Kang, see the potential for new hierarchy to emerge in East Asia.[16]

The other shortcoming of these existing explanations is the way in which they forefront the experiences of great powers, even as they purport to describe the alignment decisions of small states. In such frameworks, tertiary state policies are given typologies in a way that is described almost in similar terms to fate, due to the structural limitations of the smaller actor.

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[14] Ba, Alice D. "China and ASEAN: renavigating relations for a 21st-century Asia." Asian Survey 43, no. 4 (2003): 622-647.

[15] Gilpin, Robert. *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 1981. 121.

[16] Goh, Evelyn. "Great powers and hierarchical order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing regional security strategies." *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2008): 113-117.

Emerging research has aimed to combat these preconceptions, proposing that small states can have grand strategies.[17] While Briffa and others argue that small state national strategies are possible, they also qualify that can only come together when the stars align for tertiary states and they are freed from the most pressing structural limitations.

This paper seeks to engage with these literatures. It seeks to extend the understanding of what range of options are available to tertiary states, and what alignment conditions and what conditions of hegemony are and are not restrictive. It also seeks to recenter the conversation about small state international relations around how tertiary states interact with one another and how they perceive their own goals, and how these in turn limit or extend the reach of great power actors.

Hypotheses

Contravening realist expectations, an anti-China balancing coalition has not appeared in Southeast Asia. However, contrary to constructivist expectations, neither have states continued to hedge. In fact, some states have begun to adopt ostensibly pro-China bandwagoning postures to such a degree that the integrity of ASEAN itself is being questioned. Chinese hydroelectric investments in Laos, oil and gas pipelines in Myanmar, and unparalleled level of FDI in Cambodia would derail ASEAN's consensus-based model of governance. However, in the wake of the 2021 Myanmar coup d'état, ASEAN was still able to issue a consensus statement calling for a cessation of violence and dialogue between parties.[18] Far from representing an inability to

[17] Briffa, Hillary. "Can small states have a grand strategy?" PhD diss., King's College London, 2020.
[18] "Chairman's Statement on the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting, 24 April 2021 and Five-Point Consensus." *ASEAN*. Asean.org. Web. Accessed April 26, 2021.

reach consensus, the statement amounted to an extension of ASEAN's core mission and stood in contradiction to the previously fiercely guarded norm of mutual non-interference.

This asymmetry in outcomes between different periods of Chinese hegemonic extension (its favorable attitudes towards coup leaders being met with resistance, versus the non-communique at the Phnom Penh summit in 2012) point toward a flexible hegemonic strategy on the part of China. Su argues that China, rather than embracing the unguarded economic integration of neoliberalism, seeks to integrate with the states of the greater Mekong subregion (GMS) through a hierarchical system, where capital and resource flows are managed from the center, through the Chinese periphery, and across international borders, where sovereignty can be preserved for all actors, yet rendered fungible through special economic zones.[19]

This model of hegemonic governance, while having the potential to conflict with regional governance norms, does not necessarily conflict with them as a rule. This has several implications. First, the fault line for emerging conflict is not between ASEAN as an aggregate regional bloc and China, but rather between individual states. This insight into Chinese strategy also allows us to infer that hegemonic interference disrupting the operation of regional institutions, does not cause conflict. That is, since regional institutions can continue to function even in the presence of the hegemon, their peacebuilding effects insofar as they exist can as well.

Thus, we must look to the ruptures between individual states to ascertain why conflict continues to occur between Southeast Asian states, despite the presumed dampening effects of international institutions. Conflict has continued to arise among ASEAN members and has even occurred among states with mutual balancing or bandwagoning postures. Perhaps the most

[19] Su Xiaobo. "Rescaling the Chinese state and regionalization in the Great Mekong Subregion." *Review of International Political Economy* 19, no. 3 (2012): 501-527.

important example of intra-ASEAN conflict is the Thai-Cambodian border conflict, which has failed multiple rounds of international arbitration and is deeply embedded in the popular consciousness of both nations.[20] Other prominent examples abound, however, including border conflicts between all five MSEA states. The principal exception to this rule has historically been the Cambodian-Vietnamese border, a legacy of the decade long Vietnamese occupation which installed a Hanoi-friendly government. Even this border, however, has seen conflict, with Vietnam deploying soldiers to disputed regions in 2020,[21] remilitarizing the boundary to a degree not seen in decades.

The question to be answered is why these border conflicts ebb and flow as they do, i.e., what is the permissive condition and/or the structural incentive that allows/drives MSEA states to pursue these conflicts. One important incentive is the notion of indirect balancing, wherein tertiary states commit to balance against their neighbors, as a way of indirectly balancing the associated hegemon, which they are unable to directly resist. Such a strategy opens a plethora of new options for states, beyond balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging. There are issues with detecting such a phenomenon, most importantly, that alignment postures themselves are based on perceptions, and thus there are layers of obfuscation for both the states attempting to locate a bandwagoner against which to target their coalition and the researcher attempting to locate the phenomenon. This leads directly to an important series of hypotheses to consider before conducting a study of indirect balancing in MSEA.

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[20] Ngoun, Kimly. "Narrating the national border: Cambodian state rhetoric vs popular discourse on the Preah Vihear conflict." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 47, no. 2 (2016): 210.

[21] Lipes, Joshua. "Vietnamese Military Shelters Remain in Disputed Border Area Despite Cambodian Diplomatic Protest." *Radio Free Asia*. rfa.org. Web. Accessed April 26, 2021.

1. As the degree of hegemonic intervention increases, the amount of indirect balancing increases.

This is because even if states are misperceiving the intentions of a neighbor or a hegemon, their collective experience of hegemony which is driving them toward conflict at the root cause.

2. Rhetoric and norms of international cooperation should be expected to be constant or near constant.

The states which form the balancing coalition, do so to preserve their interests, which include their current arrangement of institutional norms. While states may bandwagon for many reasons, including opposition to regional institutions, such states may find themselves unsupported in their efforts by their hegemonic partner, given the proclivity of hegemons to value prestige and engage in regional and international forums. Cooperative rhetoric will thus occur regardless of other ongoing integrative or disintegrative pressures.

3. The collective experience of hierarchy should be perceptible among both those who balance and those who bandwagon.

Even though bandwagoners, balancers, hedgers, and intraregional balancers are enmeshed in hierarchy differently, each state is still aware of it, and the constraints it places on them.

4. Indirect balancing should be detectable by located linkages between coalition members.

The first three points will be evidenced through an empirical examination of ASEAN, drawing on literature which argues that states use international institutions as mechanisms to signal intent. The final point will be explored in case study.

Methods

This project seeks to examine the motivations for varying levels of interstate conflict among the states of MSEA, with special emphasis on the phenomenon of indirect balancing. The foreign policies of the states in ASEAN will be qualitatively evaluated with a particular emphasis on the international politics of MSEA. The severity conflicts will be measured on several metrics- using data drawn from academic secondary and contemporary primary sources- and the number of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) will be tracked over time. Such an analysis is in line with the analysis employed by Aarie Glas in 2017.[22]

Most importantly, the project will analyze ASEAN yearly summit communiques, examining word choice and frequency for evidence of the relative importance of hegemony in SEA state decision making, the level of tension among states, and degree of compromise (i.e., the degree to which states with different alignment positions are or are not accommodating each other). If the severity of conflict in MSEA is primarily driven by the relative hegemony of the international structure, then we should expect conflicts to arise in eras of increasing hegemony and decrease in eras of decreasing hegemony. We should also expect such conflicts to occur on the boundaries of alignment postures, between bandwagoning and non-bandwagoning states. Sources such as ASEAN statements and state documents should also reflect a concern about the hegemonic actor, even if that concern is not reflected in policy. Similarly, we may expect to see bandwagoning states publicly maligned as agents of the hegemon, causing tension.

The competing explanations for the shifting politics of ASEAN will be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively. The foreign policies of the states in MSEA will be qualitatively

[22] Glas, Aarie. "Habits of peace: Long-term regional cooperation in Southeast Asia." *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 4 (2017): 833-856.

evaluated with an eye towards new and emerging conflicts. Here again, Glas's analysis is particularly helpful. Quoting Palmer et al. and comparing their results to work by Ba and others, Glas finds that there has been a sustained, high level of sub-war military conflict in SEA.[23] While Glas uses these findings to complicate the claims of constructivists about the efficacy of international institutions in the SEA context, this work aims to extend that framework by marrying it with a structural analysis of the international system, and its interplay with those regional factors.

Several competing explanations will also be examined, with the results compared to the MID dataset. Realist explanations, emphasizing alliance structure and balancing postures vis-àvis great powers will be examined, looking for evidence of decreased conflict among countries with similar alliance orientations. Conversely, constructivist explanations have emphasized the presence of ASEAN as an international institution creating a dampening effect on conflict.[24] Such a project should have an effect in the data if there is a decrease in MIDs over time, as ASEAN becomes more institutionalized. Domestic institutionalist explanations have perhaps the most robust contending literature on the question of the source of MSEA international relations. Ngoun, for instance, locates the source of Thai-Khmer military conflict in domestic political rivalries,[25] while Un argues that Cambodia's alliance with China can be explained as a ploy to gain aid to buttress the flagging legitimacy of the ruling party.[25] More generally, Slater and Lai argue that regime type and regime stability are primary indicators of the likelihood of a state to

[23] Glas. "Habits of peace: Long-term regional cooperation in Southeast Asia.": 839.
[24] Glas. "Habits of peace: Long-term regional cooperation in Southeast Asia.": 834
[25] Ngoun, Kimly. "From a pile of stones to a national symbol: Preah Vihear Temple and Norodom Sihanouk's politics of postcolonial nation-building." South East Asia Research 26, no. 2 (2018): 194-212. [25] Un, Kheang. *Cambodia: Return to Authoritarianism*. Cambridge University Press, 2019. 4-6.

initiate conflict.[26]

The dual analysis of institutional history and elite statements is key in this regard. The document analysis provides evidence for depth of commitment, while at the same time allowing us to parse the factors which MSEA leaders were considering when making their international political decisions. The communiques from the ASEAN summits are published online, representing the most publicly accessible form of this elite decision-making process. The analysis will search for terms relating to hegemony/great powers, international cooperation, and domestic politics/institutions, as competing potential explanatory variables for the dependent variable of regional interstate conflict. Data on MIDs are collected by several independent monitoring agencies and is widely available, adding additional weight to this approach.

The project will thus comb the communique corpus for words relating to hegemony, great powers, or similar concepts, while also looking for terms related to specific great powers such as the United States or China. It will also look for mentions of cooperation, collaboration, and other related concepts. The frequency of these will be plotted against the relative frequency and intensity of the MIDs in the MID data. If indirect balancing is operating as it is theorized, then collaborative rhetoric should be constant (or at the very least uncorrelated with the occurrence of conflict), while increasing perceptions of hierarchy should be increased with increased levels of conflict.

[26] Lai, Brian, and Dan Slater. "Institutions of the offensive: Domestic sources of dispute initiation in authoritarian regimes, 1950–1992." *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 1 (2006): 113-126.

Empirical Analysis

Empirical evaluation of the above hypotheses on MID occurrence in Southeast Asia requires a robust, multivariate test. The unit of analysis is the country-year from 2000 to 2010, representing the years between ASEAN's expansion to its current membership (1999) and the end of available MID location data (2010). The purpose of this test is to identify how the level of *perceived regional hegemonic intrusion* influences the number of MID events per year in the region. Subscript *k* indexes the *n* control variables, giving the empirical model the following functional form:

$$(SEAMID) = b_0 + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + b_4x_4 + b_5x_5 + b_6x_6 + \sum_{k=7}^{n} b_k + e$$

This section will present the research design and key variables, before following with primary test results. These results show that the dependent variable captures much of the variation in MID occurrence. Competing explanations are discussed alongside dataset limitations.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable of interest is militarized interstate dispute occurrence in SEA. SEA MID occurrence was constructed as a numerical variable, with each year of the decade 2000-2010 assigned a number based on how many MIDs occurred that year. While this constricts the project to an 11-sample small-n analysis, this construction has several benefits over the alternatives. One possible alternative was breaking the analysis down into shorter lengths of time, coding MID occurrence as binary, and then evaluating documents which were written or released during both MID and non-MID periods. Such a project, however, would have to overcome the hurdles of nebulous start and end dates for many MIDs, as well as the long committee life of many government documents. The year-long period of analysis along with the temporally delineated ASEAN summit communiques leaves room for clear inference of

association. An alternative strategy to simply extend the analysis back in time is also flawed. First, ASEAN in the past was a very different organization, arguing for the interest of one faction of SEA against another. It would also be difficult to disentangle Cold War blocs from indirect balancing. A lower boundary of 2000 assures comparing like to like, and thus better analysis. For this project, Braithwaite's MID Location (MIDLOC) dataset version 2.1 was used. MIDs were defined as internal if they involved only ASEAN member states or ASEAN observer states. MIDs were defined as mainland if they involved at least one MSEA state.

Year	Location	Location Type	MID type
2001	Myanmar-Thailand Border	Mainland	Internal
2002	China-Vietnam (Territorial Waters)	Mainland	External
2002	China-Philippines (Territorial Waters)	Insular	External
2002	Myanmar-Thailand Border	Mainland	Internal
2003	Indonesia-Papua New Guinea Border	Insular	Internal
2003	Indonesia-Philippines (Territorial Waters)	Insular	Internal
2003	Indonesia Territorial Waters	Insular	Internal
2003	China-Vietnam (Territorial Waters)	Mainland	External
2003	Malaysia-Singapore Border	Insular	Internal
2003	Myanmar-Thailand Border	Mainland	Internal
2003	Myanmar-Thailand (Territorial Waters)	Mainland	Internal
2004	Malaysia-Thailand Border	Mainland	Internal
2004	Indonesia-Thailand (Territorial Waters)	Mainland	Internal
2004	Myanmar Territorial Waters	Mainland	Internal
2004	Myanmar-Thailand Border	Mainland	Internal
2004	India-Myanmar Border	Mainland	External
2005	Indonesia-Malaysia (Territorial Waters)	Insular	Internal
2005	Cambodia-Thailand Border (Preah Vihear)	Mainland	Internal
2005	Malaysia-Thailand Border	Mainland	Internal
2006	Malaysia-Thailand Border	Mainland	Internal
2006	Myanmar-Thailand Border	Mainland	Internal
2007	Myanmar-Thailand Border	Mainland	Internal
2008	Cambodia-Thailand Border (Preah Vihear)	Mainland	Internal
2008	Indonesia-Papua New Guinea Border	Insular	Internal
2008	Bangladesh-Myanmar Border	Mainland	External
2009	Myanmar-Thailand Border	Mainland	Internal
2009	Bangladesh-Myanmar Border	Mainland	External

Table 1. SEA MID data for the years 2000-2010.

Data are only available until the year 2010. No MIDs occurred in the years 2000 or 2010. External MIDs constituted a relatively small fraction (22%) of the total. 15 out of the 21 remaining MIDs involved MSEA states.[27] Thailand and Myanmar proved especially bellicose over the period examined (including with one another). Thailand accounted for 52% of MIDs over the 2000s, while Myanmar accounted for 44%.

Key Independent Variables

The independent variable of interest is SEA state's level of *perceived regional hegemonic intrusion* or *perceived level of hegemony*. According to the theory of indirect balancing, as states perceive a greater degree of intrusion by a hegemon, they will increase their efforts at indirect balancing, yielding intraregional conflicts. This variable, however, cannot itself be directly observed. Instead, mentions of hegemonic actors or their reach at ASEAN was used as a means of measuring SEA states' aggregate level of perceived hegemony. In this way, the communiques function as a third order representation of hegemonic intrusion in SEA, filtered first through states' perceptions and then through the institution of ASEAN.

Terms were analyzed using the metric of word use per page. Word use data were gathered from the communiqués which resulted from the annual ASEAN Ministerial Meetings (AMM). ASEAN nations take turns hosting the AMM, with the host nation acting as the meeting's chair. Data were gathered for communiqués dating from 2000 until the most recent meeting in 2020- apart from the 2012 Phnom Penh summit, when no communique was agreed to.

[27] Braithwaite, A. 2010. "MIDLOC: Introducing the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) Location Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 1: 91-98.

Specific words and their permutations were chosen as proxies for evidence of hegemonic intervention. This latter category included not only the names of hegemonic actors (e.g. US, USA, etc.), but also euphemistic references to great powers writ large, including "major powers" and "nuclear weapons states" (NWS). The number of words mentioned per page was taken and compared over time- a doubly important measure given that page counts grew dramatically over time- from 13 in 2000 to 46 in 2017. Data for key terms can be seen in the table Figure 1 below. A full table of terms can be found in the appendix.

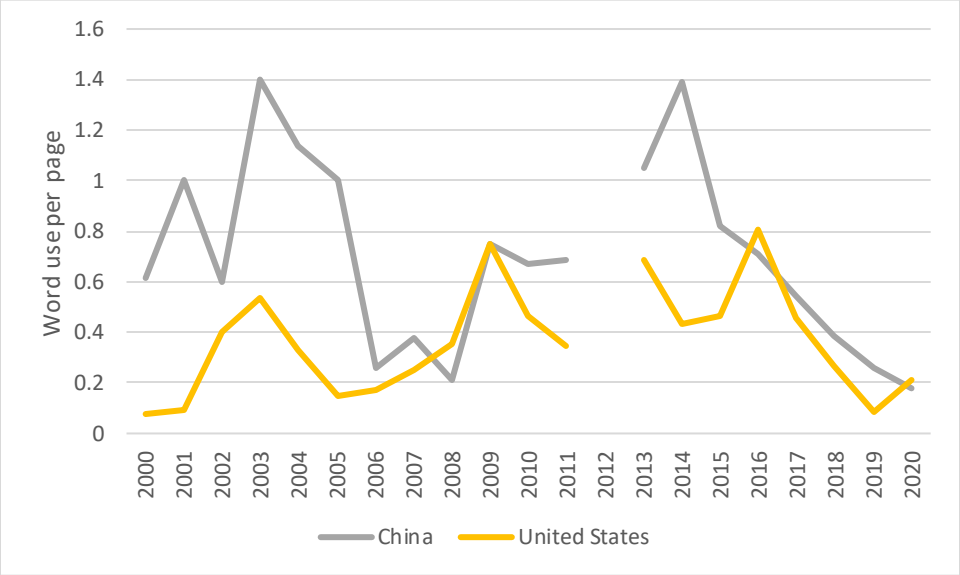

Figure 1. Word use per page over time in AMM communiques. China data are independent of the phrase "South China Sea."

Control Variables

There are several other variables that may confound the relationship between perceived hegemony and MID occurrence. A series of control variables are thus included in the study. The first of these- use of the word *integration* and its permutations over time- attempts to disaggregate those phenomena which may be causing MIDs from those which are responses to MIDs. Integration word use data gauges the centralizing impulse behind integration at the IO

level, in response to the centrifugal force of regional interstate conflict. In this way, it is both distinct from international cooperation and allows for the separation of causal factors in the analysis. *Cooperation* is another important control variable. It is possible that the degree of conflict simply increases in tandem with all other forms of state-to-state interaction. Data for cooperation and its permutations are used to control for this possibility. The study's results indicate cooperative language is uncorrelated with conflict emergence and remains consistently high throughout the studied period. The final control variable in the model is *sovereignty*. Noted as one of the founding principles of ASEAN, controlling for the relative salience of sovereignty in AMM communiques over time allows for a proxy control on recurrent border disputes. Calls for respect of all parties' sovereignty is commonplace language in the type of recurrent border disputes which occur in SEA (e.g., in West Papua or Northern Myanmar), and thus allows for a separation between border conflicts and indirect balancing.

Results

With the above-mentioned data from AMM communiques, militarized interstate dispute data for SEA was compared to search for evidence of indirect balancing. Regression analyses were conducted to see if the impact of hegemony in the AMM documents could be seen in the MIDs across the decade, as predicted by the dynamics of indirect balancing.

The MID data was thus compared to the first 11 years of AMM word use data. In this test, the rhetoric of the AMM represents a third order effect of the alignment choices (balancing, bandwagoning, hedging, and indirect balancing) which create the conditions for MIDs. The test is thus searching for evidence of the disintegrative tensions which indirect or intra-regional balancing would bring about. The table below shows the results of regression analyses for key terms across different categories.

Table 2. AMM Communique word choice and MID frequency over time

	Model 1 (F=.05)	Model 2 (F=.32)	Model 3 (F=.16)	Model 4 (F=.18)	Model 5 (F=.05)	
MSEA MID Frequency Regression Results						
Major Powers		-5.09	-5.94	22.86	8.73	(5)
China		8.15	3.55 *	-11.05	-8.16 *	(3.29)
United States		0.66	0.46	13.19	8.85 **	(3.08)
Russia		-5.88		-0.97		
Japan		-9.43		-5.84		
EU		-5.58		11.69		
Integration	4.52 **			4.10	9.13 **	(2.41)
Cooperation	-0.47			2.60	1.67	(1.11)
Sovereignty	15.31 *			43.40 *	25.17 **	(8.63)
Constant	-1.38	5.04	0.17	-12.1	-10.86	(3.92)
No. of Observations: 11, from MID data for the decade 2000-2010						

(Note. *p < .10, **p < .05)

The results of the regression models are displayed in Table 2 above. Among the control variables, integration and sovereignty are both positively correlated and statistically significant (Model 1). However, tests for great power actors are less conclusive. Alone, none of the tested great powers rise to the level of statistical significance, and the model's fit is very weak (Model 2). When great powers with less regional influence are stripped, the model's strength increases, however their reintroduction alongside controls again produces a weaker result. It is only after the inclusion of the controls and dropping the least salient great powers that we arrive at a robust model (Model 5, Adjusted R2=.75).

This analysis reveals a strong positive correlation between mentions of the US and MID occurrence, along with a negative correlation between mentions of China and MID occurrence in the same period, after controlling for IO level factors and border disputes. This result is entirely consistent with the phenomenon of indirect balancing. The 2000s represented a period of heightened US presence in Asia, and the peak of the so-called unipolar moment.[28] Indirect balancing coalitions in this period would thus be targeted against ardent US partners. The results

[28] Krauthammer, Charles. "The unipolar moment revisited." *The National Interest* 70 (2002): 5-6.

of this analysis thus also imply a shift has occurred in coalitional arrangements in SEA - and in MSEA in particular- as US influence has given way to that of China in recent years. The roots and effects of this shift are discussed later in this section.

These results may also in part demonstrate the nuanced differences between cooperation and integration, and their resultant dynamics. While the two words may both seem like bywords for ASEAN's institutional internationalism, they belie very important differences. States can cooperate on given issues while still engaging in disputes over others. Indeed, many scholars have argued that myriad factors can affect MID occurrence, with cooperative factors such as trade occurring in tandem with factors such as border tensions which exacerbate existing rivalries.[29] Integration is thus a more dramatic step than mere cooperation- seeking to enmesh states to such a degree that conflict is less feasible. In this sense of the word, pushes for integration resulting from MIDs seems evidence of their disintegratory pressures. This implies that the MIDs in question are not simply a tolerated part of diplomacy, as argued by Glas,[30] but instead constitute a true centrifugal force against which ASEAN must act. This is another piece of evidence for the fault lines expected by indirect balancing.

The relatively large standard error in the study is a result of the small-n initial analysis. Extending the dataset forward into the future would allow tests for more precise testing, as would comparison studies of other regional associations. Supplemental evidence of the relationship between hegemonic intervention and MIDs is found in the case study. The larger standard errors for the "major powers" and sovereignty results can be attributed to changes in word use patterns

[29] Haftel, Yoram Z. "Designing for peace: regional integration arrangements, institutional variation, and militarized interstate disputes." *International Organization* 61, no. 1 (2007): 231-234.
[30] Glas. "Habits of Peace": 840. Glas argues that "The habitual disposition of Southeast Asia is one that tolerates a limited level of violence among members."

over time. Both phrases become less common overall as time goes on- even as sovereignty remains linked with MID occurrence. This suggests that SEA states are reevaluating their relationships both with each other and with great powers in the late 2000s and early 2010s. This analysis will be extended in the next sub-section.

The results of these tests lend support for the for hypotheses predicted by the theory of indirect balancing. Most importantly, the tests reveal robust evidence for Hypothesis 1. The perceived increasing presence of the United States- expressed over the period of interest via the War on Terror and the Pivot to Asia- was directly associated with an increase in regional disputes. While limitations of the MID data preclude such an analysis, the newfound role of China as hegemon and the decline in China's relative salience at the AMM over time (Fig. 1) may indicate a role reversal for the two powers (i.e., China has become the target of an indirect balancing coalition).

Strong support is also found for Hypothesis 2, as rhetoric around cooperation remains constant, and is uncorrelated with the rise or fall in number of disputes. More substantively, the norms and institutions of cooperation continued to operate independent of the rate of MID occurrence. The word use data reveals that even after the 2012 Phnom Penh summit, the disruption of the AMM due to the South China Sea (SCS) dispute did not result in a long-term disruption of the organization, and ASEAN's sub-organizations and subcommittees continued to meet and carry out their work despite the top-level dispute.

Evidence for indirect balancing via links between coalition members, as predicted in Hypothesis 4, is offered by the broad contours of conflict to be found in Braithwaite's MIDLOC dataset. This picture, while incomplete, lends credence to the theory of indirect balancing. It comports with the knowledge we have of the shifting balance of power in East Asia more

generally. The 2000s coalitional arrangements may indicate indirect balancing against the United States via its longtime ally Thailand during the height of the unipolar moment- a starkly different image of SEA from the one garnered from contemporary reports, which see, for instance, renewed Cambodia-Vietnam tensions and conflict on the borders of Malaysia and the Philippines.[31] Contemporary tensions may instead be driven by indirect balancing of China by hedging states. This position, however, is open to challenge by proponents of domestic institutional explanations for interstate conflict. Indeed, Thailand and Myanmar are both states which feature the military in leading institutional positions- a key predictor of dispute initiation in Slater and Lai's model of authoritarian regimes.[32] Similarly, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar have been pointed to as weakly institutionalized, low-income outliers in an otherwise middle-income region with relatively strong institutions. This institutional weakness may drive these states to seek domestic legitimacy by engaging in international disputes, playing on nationalist fervor to build popularity. It is very likely that both processes may be at work. The important factor to disentangle is the temporal arrangement of the domestic institutional processes and the bandwagoning-to-indirect balancing process. That is, does institutional weakness cause states to bandwagon, empowering them to be bellicose and thus drive a balancing coalition against them, or does institutional weakness lead directly to bellicosity and its corresponding resistance, which in turn engenders bandwagoning?

Further evidence for these hypotheses can be found with a more granular analysis of the AMM word use data. After extending beyond the horizon of the MID data via word use trends, the paper will proceed to a contemporary case study of MIDs at the heart of the China transition.

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[31] Wilson, Sharon, and Faridah Ibrahim. "Diplomacy in reporting: The Sulu conflict in East Borneo." *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 34, no. 3 (2018).
[32] Lai and Slater. "Institutions of the Offensive": 114.

Changing AMM Word Use Over Time

One of the most striking features of the communiques at first glance is their consistency. Cooperative language is- predictably- far and away the most common and remains so at a constant level throughout the period examined. References to the SCS conversely remain infrequent, but also stay nearly static. This is especially surprising given the pressure brought to bear by China over the 2012 communique, which seemed not to alter the annual formulaic AMM call for respect for the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in SEA (TAC). Cooperation and its permutations oscillate between 2.5 and 4.5 uses per page, while the phrase "South China Sea" stayed steady at between .2 and .6 uses.

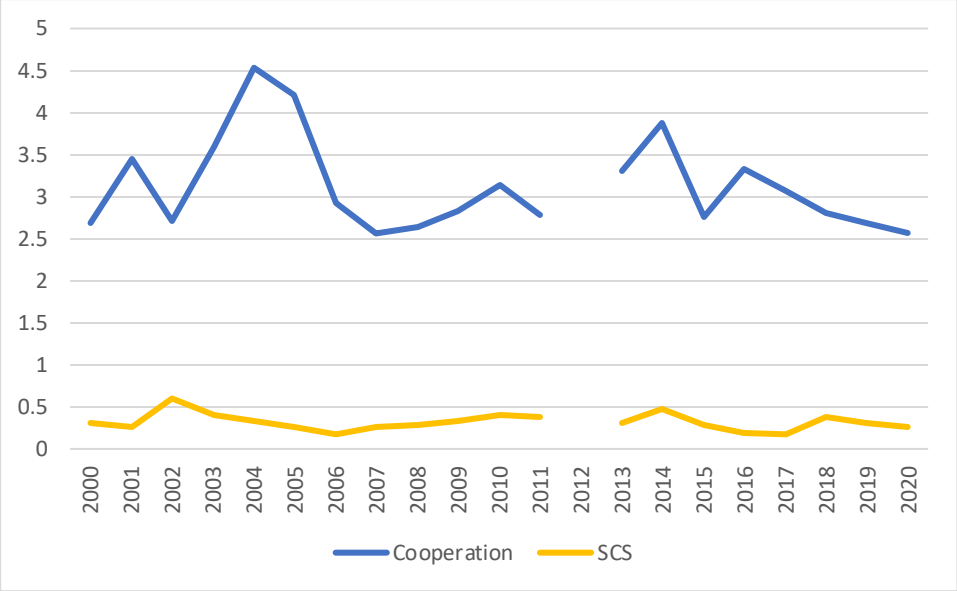

Figure 2. Word use data for cooperation and "South China Sea."

Even with the formulaic stability of the communiqués, however, there are still trends to be discerned. One important trend is the decline in the use of the term sovereignty over time. Even though ASEAN states have been noted by scholars for being among the most astute

proteges of the Westphalian sovereignty system,[33] ASEAN ministers have not opted to use that same language at their annual summits. Sovereignty and its permutations make consistent if infrequent appearances throughout the early 2000s, before disappearing almost entirely in the 2010s. This disappearance is not due to an absence of MIDs in SEA- as previously mentioned, MIDs have continued to occur throughout the 2010s in the SCS and between MSEA states. Rather, the changing rhetoric indicates a changing conceptualization of what MIDs represent and how to combat them. The limitations of the data, however, preclude a systemic analysis of the rhetoric that subsequently replaces sovereignty with the MIDs of the post 2010 era.

The most important trends, however, are those pertaining to great powers. The phrase "major powers" itself has fallen out of favor at the AMM. The phrase saw consistent use in the early 2000s but has not been used since 2008.[34] This mirrors a decline in the use of the phrase "Nuclear Weapons States", which saw similar use to major powers in the early 2000s but has since declined to see mention about once per year. This is especially surprising given the existence of the 1997 Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (SEANWFZ), a treaty which bans the use, transport, or ownership of nuclear weapons by any nation in ASEAN territory or territorial waters. Since the treaty's signing, SEA states have been engaged in a concerted (and largely Sisyphean) effort to goad NWS to become signatories to the treaty.[35] However a decline in substantive mentions and the routinization of reference to NWS' obligations (while at the

[33] Katsumata, Hiro, David Martin Jones, and Michael LR Smith. "ASEAN, regional integration, and state sovereignty." *International Security* 33, no. 2 (2008): 186. Jones and Smith argue that "ASEAN remains an essentially state sovereignty-reinforcing organization."
[34] ASEAN. "Joint Communique of the 41st ASEAN Ministerial Meeting." Singapore: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, July 21, 2008: 2.
[35] Goldblat, Jozef. "Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zones: A history and assessment." *The Non-Proliferation Review* 4, no. 3 (1997): 28.

same time devoting more attention to denuclearization on the Korean peninsula)[36] may be evidence of a decreased salience for great powers writ-large.

What does it mean that great power language is seeing less play at the AMM? Notably, this trend is not only limited to collective references, as China, the US, Japan, Russia, and the EU have all seen their individual mentions per page drop to levels beneath those seen in the 2000s. An important factor in interpreting this phenomenon comes from asking not what is driving the decline, but rather what drove word use up in the first place. Mentions of the US, for instance, first increase in 2002 following the 9/11 terror attacks, increase further in 2003 following the invasion of Iraq, and reach their 2000s peak in 2009 following Barack Obama's "Pivot to Asia." This relationship between events within the hegemonic state and its salience at the AMM is most stark in 2016, where- in the lead up to a tumultuous presidential election- the Obama administration hosted a conference of ASEAN leaders to win support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership and "signal the importance of ASEAN to its successor."[37] The later July communique recalls the February summit-[38] however the results were not long lasting and mentions began a marked decline over the Trump years.

In the Chinese example, peaks align closely with power transitions. Although direct mentions of the SCS dispute remain static throughout the years, mentions of China seem to ebb and flow in a pattern consistent with Chinese internal politics, with peaks (in 2003-2004 and 2012-2014) being correlated to transfers of power within China. Viewed through such a lens, the

[36] ASEAN. "Joint Communique of the 51st ASEAN Ministerial Meeting." Singapore: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, August 2, 2018: 25.
[37] Parameswaran, Prashanth. "Why the US-ASEAN Sunnylands Summit Matters." *The Diplomat*. February 11, 2016. Web, accessed July 9, 2021.
[38] ASEAN. "Joint Communique of the 49th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting." Vientiane: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, July 24, 2016: 25.

2012 non-communique does not represent an absence of data. Instead, it represents an exponential increase in China's words per page, given the outsized influence China had on the document and its drafting process, and can thus be seen to represent the beginning of a 2012-2014 peak. The decline in references to China may, in this framework, be a result of the stability of Chinese politics due to the consolidation of power by Xi Jinping.

Ultimately, Hypothesis 3 is thus observable in the word use data, as the influence of hegemonic actors remains evident across time and across ASEAN chairmanships. The pattern of rising and falling relative salience occurs independent of a host nation's ostensive alignment position. Evidencing the fact that the collective experience of hierarchy is perceptible among balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging states. As a region enmeshed in a hierarchical international politics, ASEAN politics shows a high degree of responsiveness to the politics of hegemonic nations such as Bush's forays into the Middle East, Obama's Pivot to Asia, and Chinese leadership changes.

While ASEAN is clearly responsive to hegemonic pressures (and to the internal politics of hegemons) the overall salience of great powers has declined over time in the language of the AMM. This raises several potential possibilities. This may indicate an invigorated, assertive ASEAN which no longer needs to consider the needs of great powers. Conversely, it may indicate aloof great powers who have temporarily become disinterested in ASEAN. Perhaps most dire, it may indicate that hegemonic influences have become so institutionalized that their salience has decreased, having become a non-issue. Or that they have become so institutionalized within certain actors that the AMM is less capable of generating consensus on issues related to them- indicating that perhaps the 2012 Phnom Penh summit had a durable legacy. Of all these options some permutation of the last two is perhaps the most likely. However, the limitations of

the MIDLOC data prevent a final determination. Case study thus present a means of extending the data forward into the present day.

Militarized Interstate Disputes and Cambodian Foreign Policy

A chief complication, even if the relationship between the presence of the hegemon and an increase in conflict has been established, is in establishing the directionality of the aggression between parties, as well as ascertaining the linkages between parties. This is in addition to ruling out prominent intervening variables, such as the pressures of domestic politics. Case selection thus must include examples where conflict did occur after hegemonic intervention, as well as examples where it did not, even if we should expect it to have occurred given other factors. Given this context, this paper will examine changes in Cambodian foreign policy, beginning in the 1980s, culminating in the present, with a special emphasis on the *Preah Vihear* border conflict with Thailand. This study will track both Cambodia's shifting domestic institutions as an explanatory variable, as well as its relationship with great powers.

The end of the Vietnam War in 1975 was also marked by the triumph of the Khmer Rouge in neighboring Cambodia that same year. Socialist brotherhood, however, rapidly gave way to animosity. Both nations found themselves on opposite sides of the Sino-Soviet split (Cambodia being Chinese aligned, while the Vietnamese were firmly aligned with Moscow) and the Khmer Rouge quickly adopted radical, Khmer nationalist policies which ended in a campaign of genocide against the nation's Vietnamese minority.[39] On Christmas, 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, deposing the Khmer Rouge before the end of January. The Vietnamese government

[39] Tarr, Chou Meng. "The Vietnamese Minority in Cambodia." *Race & Class* 34, no. 2 (1992): 33-34.

proceeded to create a pro-Soviet regime in Cambodia, supplemented by Vietnamese occupation forces, who did not withdraw until the end of 1989.

The course of the occupation was marked by perennial border disputes with Thailand, including exchanges of artillery fire, air, and naval combat incidents, as well as consistent use of Cambodian proxy forces by both sides. Thailand armed and sheltered both the Khmer Rouge and the royalist FUNCINPEC, who eventually merged to form a western-recognized government in exile.[40] Vietnamese troops would fire into Thai territory while pursuing guerrillas. This period- compounding extant historical animosities- generated a fierce rivalry between the two nations.

This period of civil war gave way to UNTAC, the 1992-1993 transitional government of Cambodia, put in place by the United Nations after the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops in 1989, and the subsequent convening of the Paris Peace Process by the warring parties in Cambodia. UNTAC was in many ways a revolutionary product of the end of the Cold War. The United Nations was taking over administration of an entire nation- complete with police powers- and was tasked with drafting a constitution and running an election. This radical, liberal interventionist vision not only marked a departure from Cold War norms, but also from the ASEAN norms of nonintervention and noninterference.

Middle power states the world over jumped at the chance to gain influence in the region. States such as France and Pakistan committed large numbers of money and peacekeepers to the project- and UNTAC even marked the first-ever deployment of Japanese troops overseas since the Second World War. Such an environment- in which traditional norms are broken, and states jockey for status and influence- is not a traditional recipe for stability. Yet at the same time, it

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[40] Abuza, Zachary. "The Future of the Khmer Rouge: Internal and External Variables." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (1994): 444.

represented a liberating moment for Cambodian foreign policy, where the state was free to choose its own foreign policy and had a bevy of partners to choose from. This period also marks a lull in MIDs in MSEA,[41] providing evidence for the relationship between the presence of great power influence (in this case China and the Soviet Union) and MID occurrence.

However, the strongest evidence for the relationship comes from contemporary post-UNTAC Cambodian politics. The government which emerged from UNTAC was unstable-seeing a coup in 1997 and repeated arrests of opposition leaders.[42] At the same time, its erstwhile patrons from the 1990s fell through. European nations placed restrictive conditionalities for institutional democracy, while Japan's capacity was badly damaged by the Asian Financial Crisis. With its options limited, and regime legitimacy threatened, Cambodia turned to China.

This politicking occurred against the backdrop of the Thai-Cambodian border conflict of the 2000s, which centered around control of the medieval monument of *Preah Vihear* (lit. holy temple), a UNESCO world heritage site which rests on the border between the two countries. During the late 2000s and early 2010s, Cambodia and Thailand repeatedly exchanged artillery fire around the temple complex. While the conflict certainly aroused nationalist sentiments, Cambodia had firmly adopted a bandwagoning posture by the 2010s, as evidenced by the capacity of Chinese leaders to influence the 2012 non-communique.

This chain of events points towards indirect balancing rather than institutional factors alone. Thailand in the late 1990s and early 2000s was a stalwart US ally. This was in part an artefact of its previous Cold War alignment,[43] but also was the result of US assistance to help

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[41] Glas. "Habits of Peace": 839.
[42] Un. *Cambodia: Return to Authoriatrianism*: 10-11.
[43] Busbarat, Pongphisoot. "Thai–US relations in the post-Cold War era: untying the special relationship." *Asian Security* 13, no. 3 (2017): 256-274.

combat Islamist separatism in Thailand's south during the opening years of the War on Terror.[44] These structural factors appear to shape intraregional balancing coalitions independently of -or at least before- institutional factors, as Thailand underwent a coup in 2006 in the middle of the examined period, and the coalition contours remained relatively stable. Those contours did shift, however, in the 2010s. In the face of American retrenchment and strengthening Chinese partnerships built on economic aid,[45] the locus of SEA indirect balancing shifted towards China's partners, including Cambodia. The Cambodia case, thus provides evidence for Hypotheses 1 and 4. Indirect balancing of Cambodian bandwagoning preceded any institutionally driven Cambodian MID. Meanwhile the intensifying Chinese presence in MSEA has pushed even historic rivals Vietnam and Thailand together, as both countries find themselves on the same side of an anti-Cambodia-Laos coalition.

While the limited temporal scope of the MID data precludes definitive conclusions about changes over time, the changing form of SEA balancing coalitions can still be observed in the data over time. For example, throughout the period of the 2000s, no MIDs occurred involving Brunei, Laos, or Timor l'Este. This is especially remarkable given that Laos borders both the especially bellicose Thailand and Myanmar, while Timor l'Este borders Indonesia, another frequent MID participant. Cambodia, meanwhile, engaged in repeated disputes with Thailand, but none with historical rival Vietnam. These data paint a picture of early 2000s MSEA in which Thailand is the target of a more-or-less concerted balancing coalition, composed of Cambodia,

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[44] Prasirtsuk, Kitti. "An Ally at the Crossroads: Thailand in the US Alliance System." *Global Allies: Comparing US Alliances in the 21st Century* (2017): 130.

[45] Raymond, Gregg. "China's quest for infrastructure and influence in mainland Southeast Asia." *Jagged Sphere*. June 30, 2021. The Lowy Institute. Web. Accessed July 28, 2021. https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/jagged-sphere

Myanmar, and Malaysia, and possibly also including the likes of Indonesia (who engaged in one maritime MID with Thailand over the studied period).

Figure 3. Graph of Southeast Asian MID intensity 2000-2010. Circle size indicates relative number of MIDs between given countries. Range between 1 and 8 (Myanmar-Thailand).

In recent years, the relative peacefulness of MSEA nations' eastern frontiers has given way to renewed conflicts, including the aforementioned 2017 tensions between Cambodia and Laos and ongoing tensions between Cambodia and Vietnam.[46] There is already apprehension about Cambodia's role as AMM chair in 2022,[47] especially in the wake of the coup in Myanmar, the latter of which is seen as yet more evidence of Chinese intrusion into SEA.[48] As the perceived degree of Chinese interference increases one consequence may be the bifurcation of ASEAN into warring blocs. Insular states with more robust economies and political institutions

[46] Blomberg, Matt. "'Please show mercy': Evicted by Cambodia, ethnic Vietnamese stuck at watery border." *Reuters*. Reuters.com. Web. Accessed July 25, 2021.
[47] Heng, Kimkong. "Cambodia to chair ASEAN in choppy waters." *East Asia Forum*. Eastasiaforum.org. Web. Accessed July 20, 2021.
[48] Hamzah, B.A. "ASEAN Splinters Over Myanmar Condemnation." *Asia Sentinel*. Asiasentinel.com. Web. Accessed July 21, 2021.

may maintain hedging postures, while at the same time applying internal pressure against pro-China members. While ASEAN was able to weather tension in the past between states with differing degrees of attachment to the United States, a repeat of Cambodia's 2012 chairmanship may do significant harm to the institution.

Conclusion

This study presents substantial evidence for the phenomenon of indirect balancing. Working in tandem with domestic institutional factors, international structural factors engender regional conflicts at a sub-great power level. This creates the dynamic of a multi-level game, wherein states who soft balance, hedge, or even bandwagon at the level of international politics, engage in indirect balancing at the regional level. ASEAN- and the subregion of MSEA in particular- represent a uniquely important example of this phenomenon, given their position between a retrenching US and a rising China, as well as the presence of institutionally weak states with a proclivity for bandwagoning.

The region represents an especially important case study in this regard. Not only is MSEA uniquely positioned relative to China, but it also contains a relatively large number of states who have previously adopted hedging strategies. This adds empirical weight to the conclusion that the competition seen in analyses was not only a second order effect of great power rivalry, but a dynamic unique to the regional level. When MSEA states did have perceptible alignment postures, these comported with changes in MID occurrence, as with Thailand's previously robust ties with the US, or Cambodia's emerging ties to China and the resultant MIDs where none had before existed.

Strong supporting evidence was found in the data for Hypotheses 2 and 3 which serve as permissive conditions for indirect balancing. Hypothesis 4, which serves as a measure of theory testability, also finds support, although more complete and up-to-date data on MIDs in SEA would strengthen it even further. Finally, it was demonstrated that- as predicted by Hypothesis 1- the increasing degree of hegemonic pressure causes increasing indirect balancing. US retrenchment in the region has been supplemented by a growing Chinese influence, which has in turn reconfigured new intra-regional balancing coalitions- including coalitions connecting longtime rivals.

These findings present several opportunities for future research. First, there is the obvious opportunity to extend the MID dataset beyond the temporal bounds of MIDLOC (which, extending from 1816-2010, is one of the most extensive extant MID datasets). Systematically codifying journalistic accounts of the past decade would allow both for a more robust test of the claims of this paper, via more robust mapping of the contours of balancing coalitions over time. Second, the possibility of elite interviews with ASEAN officials or officials with ASEAN member states would greatly enrich this study. In addition to revealing conflicting interests which are left out of the final AMM documents, these would be a vital tool for empirically ascertaining the degree of perceived hegemonic influence, which could be better compared to MID occurrence.

These practical considerations are in addition to other literatures which would benefit from an analysis which considers indirect balancing. Indirect balancing complicates literature on grand strategy by providing more agency and options to tertiary states. This leads to a whole host of questions for both academics and policymakers (Chinese and American) to consider when interacting with regional partners. More care should be taken to ask, not only "how will this

partnership affect the balance of power"- but also "how will this partnership affect the regional balance of power?" Will allies face potential blowback from neighbors?

Similarly, the theory of indirect balancing asks scholars of international relations to reimagine what tertiary states are capable of and ask whether they are capable of grand-er strategies than previously thought. The complex two-level game being played by SEA states- hedging between China and the US on the one hand, while balancing against Chinese allies on the other- opens exciting opportunities in the study of small state strategy.

All in all, the process of indirect balancing is illustrative of a dynamic, changeable regional politics. While SEA may be unique in its position adjacent to China, this process is likely at work throughout the international system. With a relatively broad set of permissive conditions (the presence of a hegemon, the presence of at least some weak states, and a robust regional sub-system), indirect balancing may be imagined in a wide array of circumstances. This presents exciting opportunities and challenges for states seeking to navigate a changing world.

Appendix

Appendix of data from AMM communiques and select MIDLOC dataset entries.

Host	Thailand	Vietnam	Brunei	Cambodia	Indonesia	Laos	Malaysia
Page length	13	11	10	15	15	20	23
Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Host	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam	Indonesia	Cambodia	Brunei
Page length	16	14	12	15	29	N/A	19
Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Host	Myanmar	Malaysia	Laos	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
Page length	23	28	31	46	26	23	28
Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020

Table 3. AMM communique information by year.

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Integration	11	11	9	24	12	26	17
Cooperation	35	38	27	54	68	84	67
Sovereignty	1	0	1	2	4	2	1
Major Powers	2	5	1	0	0	1	0
China	8	11	6	21	17	20	6
United States	1	1	4	8	5	3	4
Russia	0	0	2	2	3	3	10
Japan	5	5	1	9	9	7	3
EU	3	2	0	12	3	8	6
NWS	3	3	3	0	2	2	1
United Nations	14	21	6	9	18	17	34
Security	7	10	9	15	28	19	22
Conflict	1	0	2	1	4	0	3
SCS	4	3	6	6	5	5	4

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Integration	14	11	10	10	18	N/A	17
Cooperation	41	37	34	47	81	N/A	63
Sovereignty	0	0	0	1	0	N/A	0
Major Powers	0	1	0	0	0	N/A	0
China	6	3	9	10	20	N/A	20
United States	4	5	9	7	10	N/A	13
Russia	6	3	4	7	8	N/A	10
Japan	4	1	4	8	16	N/A	15
EU	8	2	4	4	8	N/A	13
NWS	0	1	1	1	2	N/A	1
United Nations	9	6	11	10	29	N/A	9
Security	24	18	14	21	28	N/A	27
Conflict	2	0	1	0	12	N/A	2
SCS	4	4	4	6	11	N/A	6

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Integration	22	25	27	24	15	16	10
Cooperation	89	77	103	141	73	62	72
Sovereignty	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Major Powers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
China	32	23	22	25	10	6	5
United States	10	13	25	21	7	2	6
Russia	8	16	19	13	2	3	2
Japan	18	13	19	15	6	5	2
EU	25	30	23	25	2	4	3
NWS	1	3	2	1	1	1	2
United Nations	10	12	22	32	23	20	33
Security	49	48	53	59	39	33	52
Conflict	4	1	4	6	4	4	6
SCS	11	8	6	8	10	7	7

Table 4. Word counts over time. Data for all words are data including word permutations. Data for “China” are data without the phrase “South China Sea” which is included alone in its own category. Data for “US” are without the phrases “USD” and “US Dollar.” “Security” data are without the phrase “Security Council” which is included under “UN.” “Nuclear weapons states” data only include the phrase “nuclear weapons states” and its abbreviation “NWS.” More ambiguous references to nuclear weapons are withheld. Data for “EU” include references to the European Commission.

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Integration	0.85	1.00	0.90	1.60	0.80	1.3	0.74
Cooperation	2.69	3.45	2.70	3.60	4.53	4.2	2.91
Sovereignty	0.08	0.00	0.10	0.13	0.27	0.1	0.04
Major Powers	0.15	0.45	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.00
China	0.62	1.00	0.60	1.40	1.13	1	0.26
United States	0.08	0.09	0.40	0.53	0.33	0.15	0.17
Russia	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.13	0.20	0.15	0.43
Japan	0.38	0.45	0.10	0.60	0.60	0.35	0.13
EU	0.23	0.18	0.00	0.80	0.20	0.4	0.26
NWS	0.23	0.27	0.30	0.00	0.13	0.1	0.04
United Nations	1.08	1.91	0.60	0.60	1.20	0.85	1.48
Security	0.54	0.91	0.90	1.00	1.87	0.95	0.96
Conflict	0.08	0.00	0.20	0.07	0.27	0	0.13
SCS	0.31	0.27	0.60	0.40	0.33	0.25	0.17

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Integration	0.88	0.79	0.83	0.67	0.62	N/A	0.89
Cooperation	2.56	2.64	2.83	3.13	2.79	N/A	3.32
Sovereignty	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.00	N/A	0.00
Major Powers	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	N/A	0.00
China	0.38	0.21	0.75	0.67	0.69	N/A	1.05
United States	0.25	0.36	0.75	0.47	0.34	N/A	0.68
Russia	0.38	0.21	0.33	0.47	0.28	N/A	0.53
Japan	0.25	0.07	0.33	0.53	0.55	N/A	0.79
EU	0.50	0.14	0.33	0.27	0.28	N/A	0.68
NWS	0.00	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.07	N/A	0.05
United Nations	0.56	0.43	0.92	0.67	1.00	N/A	0.47
Security	1.50	1.29	1.17	1.40	0.97	N/A	1.42
Conflict	0.13	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.41	N/A	0.11
SCS	0.25	0.29	0.33	0.40	0.38	N/A	0.32

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Integration	0.96	0.89	0.87	0.52	0.58	0.70	0.36
Cooperation	3.87	2.75	3.32	3.07	2.81	2.70	2.57
Sovereignty	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00
Major Powers	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
China	1.39	0.82	0.71	0.54	0.38	0.26	0.18
United States	0.43	0.46	0.81	0.46	0.27	0.09	0.21
Russia	0.35	0.57	0.61	0.28	0.08	0.13	0.07
Japan	0.78	0.46	0.61	0.33	0.23	0.22	0.07
EU	1.09	1.07	0.74	0.54	0.08	0.17	0.11
NWS	0.04	0.11	0.06	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.07
United Nations	0.43	0.43	0.71	0.70	0.88	0.87	1.18
Security	2.13	1.71	1.71	1.28	1.50	1.43	1.86
Conflict	0.17	0.04	0.13	0.13	0.15	0.17	0.21
SCS	0.48	0.29	0.19	0.17	0.38	0.30	0.25

Table 5. Word use per page data for all tested terms.

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total:	Mean:
Total SEA MIDS	0	1	3	7	5	3	2	1	3	2	0	27	2.7
External MIDS	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	5	0.5
MSEA MIDS	0	1	1	2	4	2	2	1	1	1	0	15	1.5

Table 6. Numerical data for SEA MIDs for the decade 2000-2010. No MIDs occurred in 2010 or 2000. Overall MIDs peaked in 2003.

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